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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION UN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL US-
MERCOSUR TIES 03/16/06

1. SUMMARY STATEMENT

Today's major local newspapers lead with the creation of the UN Human Rights Council to replace "the discredited UN Human Rights Commission." Based on an article from the New York "Forward" magazine, business-financial, center-right "InfoBae's" Website reports that "The Bush administration asked Argentina to formally file charges against the Iranian government officials linked to the attack against AMIA headquarters in Buenos Aires, as part of the USG's strategy to isolate the country, whose nuclear activity raised concern in the West."

2. OPINION PIECES AND KEY STORIES

- "Human Rights Council, a retreat for the US"

Hugo Alconada Mon, Washington-based correspondent for daily-of-record "La Nacion," comments (03/16) "With the US and Israel's isolated opposition and the support of Argentina and other 169 countries, the UN approved yesterday the creation of the Human Rights Council, which will replace the discredited Geneva-based Committee.

"Promoters of the reform expect the Council to be more efficient in the defense of human rights in some of the most violent countries, such as Sudan and Myanmar, to protect the victims and help prevent or reverse human rights violations.

"Even Cuba voted in favor of the new Council, and three countries (Venezuela, Iran and Belarus) abstained.

"Only the Marshall islands and Palau joined Israel and the White House in voting against the creation of the Council. The White House believes the reform will not prevent major human rights abusers from joining the Council and hindering voting, as happened at the UN Human Rights Committee.

"... While the US voted in favor of keeping a widely criticized Committee, although with well-known shortfalls, Argentina, Canada, the EU and the main human rights institutions, among others, supported the reform and are confident that the Human Rights Council will be more satisfactory."

- "Chacho Alvarez asks for more integration vis--vis the 'hegemonic power'"

Natasha Niebieskikwiat, columnist of leading "Clarín," writes (03/16) "The head of the Mercosur Representatives Committee, Carlos 'Chacho' Alvarez, surprised the parsimonious protocol ceremony of the 15th anniversary of Mercosur with a conclusive call 'to defend the strategic sense of regional integration.' He said that in order to face the 'hegemonic power's' strong presence, it is crucial that the countries 'act in blocs.'

"... Alvarez' call sounded like a warning due to the increasingly explicit US 'flirting' with Uruguay and Paraguay to persuade them to sign individual free trade deals."

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